

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-02 L-01

INR-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 EUR-08 /046 W

----- 121708

R 221535Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5241

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 2719

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT EC

SUBJECT: POLITICAL TEMPERATURE RISES IN QUITO

1. SUMMARY: OPPOSITIONIST EFFORTS TO EMBARRASS GOE OVER ALLEGED TIES WITH COMMUNIST PARTY AND ALLEGED EXTRAVAGANCES OF PRESIDENTIAL PARTY DURING COURSE OF PRESIDENT'S RECENT FOREIGN TRIP AS WELL AS A RESURGENCE OF MORE CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY, HAVE CAUSED THE POLITICAL TEMPERATURE TO RISE SOMEWHAT IN QUITO. ALTHOUGH THINGS HAVE NOT YET REACHED THE BOILING POINT, THEY ARE DEFINITELY SIMMERING AND ECUADOREAN POLITICAL SCENE APPEARS TO BE EXPERIENCING THE MOST CONCERTED CIVILIAN EFFORT TO UNDERMINE REGIME IN THE 3 YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE. FOR ITS PART, THE GOE, THOUGH NOT SERIOUSLY THREATENED, HAS REACTED WITH ITS USUAL HYPER-SENSITIVITY, LASHING OUT AT THE "TRADITIONALIST OLIGARCHS" WHO STAND IN THE WAY OF NATIONAL PROGRESS, AND IN RECENT DAYS IT HAS ORDERED SEVERAL POLITICAL ARRESTS, INCLUDING THAT OF PROMINENT COLUMNIST AND FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER, JULIO PRADO VALLEJO. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING THE 3 YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE, THE RODRIGUEZ LARA REGIME HAS EXPERIENCED ONLY THE MILDEST AND MOST OCCASIONAL POLITICAL TURBULENCE. IT HAS KEPT ITS LEFT
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FLANK COVERED BY PLACATING THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY AND HAS CATERED TO THE MASSES BY ADOPTING A STRONG RHETORICAL STAND AGAINST ITS "OLIGARCH" PREDECESSORS WITHOUT TAKING ANY DRASTIC PRACTICAL MEASURES TO HURT THEIR SPECIFIC INTERESTS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE GOVERNMENT HAS CARRIED OUT SINCE OCTOBER 1973 A DELICATE BALANCING ACT BETWEEN THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICALITIES OF LAND REFORM. NO SOONER HAD THE INK BEEN DRY ON THE 1973 AGRARIAN REFORM LAW THAN THE GOVERNMENT FOUND ITSELF RESPONDING AND ACCOMMODATING TO PRESSURES FROM THE LARGE TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS. IN PRACTICALLY EVERY SECTOR OF THE NATIONS LIFE, THE GOVERNMENT HAS FOUND THAT WHERE IMPORTANT CLASSIC INTERESTS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, THEY HAVE BEEN IN AN ALMOST CONSTANT JUGGLING ACT, SEEKING TO MAINTAIN A POPULIST IMAGE WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THE COUNTRY'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES CANNOT BE MODIFIED OVERNIGHT.

3. IN RECENT WEEKS THERE HAVE BEEN AN INCREASING NUMBER OF SIGNS THAT SOMETHING MIGHT HAVE TO GIVE IN WHAT UP TILL NOW HAS BEEN A RATHER CLEVER BALANCING ACT. WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE HAPPENED IS THAT AFTER THREE YEARS OF ALMOST TOTAL SILENCE, CIVILIAN POLITICAL FORCES IN ECUADOR, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY VOCAL IN EXPRESSING THEIR CONCERN OVER WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE THE DIRECTION OF THIS GOE. THEY SEE PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ AS ESSENTIALLY WELL-INTENTIONED AND NON-IDEOLOGICAL; BUT THEY BELIEVE HIM TO BE SURROUNDED BY A NUMBER OF ADVISORS WHO ARE MOVING THIS COUNTRY INEXORABLY TO THE LEFT, NOT ONLY DOMESTICALLY BUT IN TERMS OF ECUADOR'S ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER NATIONS OF THE WORLD. THEY VIEW WITH CONCERN, FOR EXAMPLE, THE ALMOST CONSTANT BAITING OF THE US, MULTINATIONAL COOPERATIONS AND SO FORTH; AND ECUADOR'S DEVELOPING TIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER BLOC COUNTRIES MAKE THEM NERVOUS.

4. PRESENT EXPRESSIONS OF DISCONTENT BY TRADITIONAL CIVILIAN GROUPS BEGAN AT ABOUT THE TIME OF THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE REGIME IN FEBRUARY. THE TWO PREVIOUS ANNIVERSARIES HAD ALSO BEEN OPEN SEASON AGAINST THE GOE. BUT RATHER THAN FIZZLING OUT, AS MIGHT HAVE NORMALLY BEEN EXPECTED, MUTTERINGS OF DISCONTENT AND EFFORTS TO DO SOMETHING

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ABOUT IT KEPT UP THIER MOMENTUM. AT FIRST, THIS TOOK THE FORM OF AN ABORTIVE COUP PLOT. THE COUP PLOTTING NEVER REALLY HAD A CHANCE. IT INVOLVED A NUMBER OF CONSERVATIVE AND PONCISTA CIVILIAN POLITICIANS WHO CONSPIRED DURING THE MONTHS OF FEBRUARY AND MARCH WITH GEN. GALO LATORRE TO DEPOSE PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ WHILE HE WAS OUT OF THE COUNTRY ON HIS VISIT TO ALGERIA, ROMANIA AND VENEZUELA. AS THE CONSPIRATORS QUICKLY FOUND OUT,

LATORRE DID NOT HAVE THE WIDESPREAD BACKING WITHIN THE MILITARY THAT HE HAD CLAIMED AND PLANS TO FORCIBLY REPLACE THE REGIME WERE QUIETLY DROPPED.

5. PARALLELING THESE CONSPIRATORIAL EFFORTS WAS A DECISION, AGAIN PROBABLY INSPIRED BY FORMER PRESIDENT PONCE AND HIS FOLLOWERS, TO NONETHELES SEEK A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOE BE PEACEFUL MEANS AND EVENTS SINCE THE ABORTIVE COUP PLOT OF MIDDLE MARCH HAVE SHOWN THE EXISTENCE OF SUBSTANTIALLY MORE SYSTEMATIC ORGANIZATION IN CARRYING OUT THIS DECISION THAN MIGHT ORIGINALLY HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. THE ACTIVITY HAS TAKEN TWO FORMS. FIRST THERE HAS BEEN AN UPSURGE IN THE DISSEMINATION OF ANONYMOUS AND SENSATIONAL POLITICAL TRACTS AIMED, INTER ALIA, AT LINKING THE GOE WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY. OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME HAVE ALSO CAUSED TO BE PUBLISHED A LIST, OF QUESTIONABLE AUTHENTICITY, OF CORRESPONDENTS AND BROADCASTERS ALLEGED TO BE ON THE GOE PAYROLL (SEE QUITO 2123). FINALLY, THERE HAS BEEN A PUBLIC ACCUSATION (PURPORTEDLY BASED ON SECRET GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS) BY NOTED COLUMNIST AND FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER JULIO PRADO VALLEJO TO THE EFFECT THAT PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ AND HIS PARTY SPENT \$600,000 DURING THEIR RECENT FOREIGN TRAVELS (IN RESPONSE GOE HAS PUBLICLY DOCUMENTED TRIP EXPENSE, WHICH COME OUT TO SUBSTANTIALLY LESS THAN CHARGED.) ONE OF THE DOCUMENTS LINKING THE GOE TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND NOW CIRCULATING PUBLICLY IS A DIRECTIVE ATTRIBUTED TO PC GENERAL SECRETARY PEDRO SAAD REplete WITH TALK ABOUT THE TIME BEING RIPE FOR TOPPLING THE BOURGEOIS SYSTEM IN ECUADOR AND EXTOLLING THE CLOSE TIES BETWEEN THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT, EXPECIALLY ON PETROLEUM POLICY MATTERS. (MORE DETAILS CONCERNING THIS DOCUMENT AND THE CONTROVERSY IT HAS STIRRED WILL

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BE REPORTED SEPTTEL). SAAD AND HIS PARTY HAVE PUBLICLY DENOUNCED THE DOCUMENT AS A FRAUD (WHICH WE STRONGLY SUSPECT IT IS); BUT IT HAS NONETHELESS RECEIVED WIDE PUBLIC DISSEMINATION INCLUDING VERBATIM PUBLICATION IN ECUADOR'S NATIONAL DAILIES.

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INR-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 EUR-08 /046 W

----- 122068

R 221535Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5242

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

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6. THE REGIME'S OPPONENTS HAVE NOT CONFINED THEMSELVES TO CONSPIRATORIAL TACTICS. TO THE EXTENT PERMITTED BY AN AUTHORITARIAN GOE, THEY HAVE COMBINED THEM WITH MORE CONVENTIONAL, OPEN AND ABOVE-BOARD POLITICAL ACTIVITY. SINCE THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE REGIME VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE GRAND OLD MEN OF ECUADOREAN POLITICS HAVE PRO- NOUNCED THEMSELVES PUBLICLY ON THE STATE OF THE NATION, LAMBASTING THE GOVERNMENT FOR ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT AND CALLING FOR A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PROCESSES. FORMER PRESIDENTS PONCE AND CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN GRANTING INTERVIEWS TO NATIONAL NEWS MAGAZINES. EVEN EXILED PRESIDENT VELASCO IBARRA ACCORDED A MAJOR INTERVIEW TO NUEVA MAGAZINE IN FEBRUARY. COM- PLETING THIS FOURSOME HAS BEEN FORMER GUAYAQUIL MAJOY AND ONE-TIME PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL ASSAD BUCARAM WHO, BREAKING A VIRTUALLY TOTAL SILENCE OF ALMOST 3 YEARS, HAS SPOKEN PUBLICLY ON AT LEAST 3 OCCASIONS IN THE PAST 2 MONTHS. NOW, TO KEEP THE PRESSURE UP THESE SAME POLITICAL LEADERS (EXCEPT BUCARAM WHO PREFERS A LOWER PROFILE) HAVE BEGUN TO SPONSOR A SERIES OF "POLITICAL COCKTAILS" DESIGNED TO RALLY THEIR FOLLOWERS AND, PRESUMABLY, CIRCUMVENT CURRENT GOE RESTRICTIONS AGAINST POLITICAL MEETINGS.

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7. IN THE PAST 2 WEEKS THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF THESE "POLITICAL COCKTAILS" IN HONOR OF FRANCISCO DARQUEA, A NOTED TV COMMENTATOR AND GOVERNMENT CRITIC RECENTLY RELIEVED OF HIS POSITION BY QUITO'S CHANNEL 8 UNDER WHAT

MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE TO HAVE BEEN PRESSURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT. THE NEXT SUCH EVENT IS A "HOMAGE" IN HONOR OF TWO OTHER ECUADOREAN JOURNALISTS, AGAIN IN THE FORM OF A COCKTAIL, SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE ON APRIL 24 AT QUITO'S PRESTIGIOUS HOTEL COLON. QUITO'S APRIL 19 NEWSPAPERS ADVERTISED THE EVENT, LISTING AMONG THE SPONSORS THE 3 ABOVE MENTIONED EX-PRESIDENTS AND THEN GIVING THE NAMES OF ABOUT 200 "SUBSCRIBERS". THE SUBSCRIBER LIST, WHICH IS STILL GROWING, READS LIKE A WHO'S WHO IN ECUADOREAN CIVILIAN POLITICS (MINUS THE COMMUNISTS) AND ALSO INCLUDES AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS PERSONALITIES, AMONG THEM OWNER OF QUITO DAIL EL TIEMPO AND SELF-MADE MULTI-MILLIONAIRES ANTONIO GRANDA CENTENO.

8. THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTION TO THIS UPSURGE IN CIVILIAN RESTLESSNESS HAS BEEN TO GO ON THE ATTACK ITSELF. PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ'S SPEECH ON MARCH 24 (SEE QUITO 2170) IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF REGIME'S LINE. HE ATTACKED THE "OLIGARCHS" THE "POLITICAL IMPRESARIOS" AND THE OTHER "TRADITIONALISTS" WHO WOULD RETURN THE COUNTRY TO THE "BURLESQUE OF INTERIM GOVERNMENTS AND CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLIES". RODRIGUEZ REAFFIRMED THAT IT WAS NOT THE MILITARY'S INTENTION TO PERPETUATE ITS POWER BUT WENT ON TO SAY THAT "SUBVERSIVE" RESISTANCE TO GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS WAS PUTTING OFF THE DAY WHEN THE GOE COULD STEP DOWN. THE TENOR OF RODRIGUEZ' REMARKS HAVE BEEN REPEATED SINCE WITH EVEN GREATER EMPHASIS BY OTHER SPOKESMEN OF THE REGIME. ON APRIL 18, MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT POVEDA LASHED OUT AT THE "SUBVERSIVE" EFFORTS OF A HANDFUL OF CITIZENS WHO WERE "TRYING TO REVIVE MANEUVERS FROM TIMES PAST".

9. IN ADDITION TO A VIGOROUS VERBAL REACTION, THE GOVERNMENT HAS FINALLY CHOSEN TO ORDER SEVERAL POLITICAL ARRESTS, FOR THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF WHICH WAS THAT ON APRIL 18 FOR THE DETENTION OF DR. PRADO SO THAT HE COULD BE

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QUESTIONED IN CONNECTION WITH THE ALLEGATIONS THAT EXTRAVAGANT EXPENDITURES HAD BEEN INCURRED DURING THE PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN TRIP. PRADO HAS GONE INTO HIDING.

10. WHAT DO THESE POLITICAL FORCES REALLY HOPE TO ACHIEVE BY THESE ACTIVITIES? PERHAPS THE SIMPLEST ANSWER IS THAT THEY ARE POLITICIANS AND THAT THREE YEARS OF DISCRETION AND SELF-IMPOSED SILENCE WAS MORE THAN ANYONE COULD EXPECT. BUT BEYOND THAT, THE STATED PURPOSE, AT LEAST OF THE VELASQUISTAS AND PONCISTAS, IS TO BRING ABOUT A RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE THROUGH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (EVEN THEY AGREE WITH PRESIDENT

RODRIGUEZ ON HIS POINT ABOUT THE "BURLESQUE" OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLIES). BUT FOR THE GOE TO AGREE TO SUCH ELECTIONS WOULD BE TO CONSENT TO ITS OWN DEMISE AND WE DOUBT THAT THESE GROUPS HAVE ANY ILLUSIONS ABOUT BRINGING THIS GOVERNMENT DOWN. THEY ARE SIMPLY NOT THAT WELL ORGANIZED; THEY DO NOT HAVE THE INSTITUTIONAL BACKING; AND THERE ARE VIRTUALLY NO SIGNS OF SERIOUS DIVISION WITHIN THE MILITARY, AT THE MOMENT AN INDISPENSABLE ELEMENT FOR SUCCESS IN A POWER STRUGGLE HERE.

11. IF, THEN THE PROSPECTS FOR REMOVAL OF THE RODRIGUEZ REGIME ARE REMOTE, AS WE BELIEVE THEY ARE AND AS WE BELIEVE THE OPPOSITIONISTS RECOGNIZE, THEN THEIR REAL SIGHTS ARE PROBABLY SOMEWHAT LOWER. THE MOST PLAUSIBLE OBJECTIVE OF THE CURRENT ROUND OF POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IS IN ALL LIKELIHOOD SIMPLY DESIGNED TO REMIND THE GOVERNMENT THAT ECUADOR'S TRADITIONAL POLS ARE STILL A FORCE IN NATIONAL LIFE: A FORCE WHICH SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT AND SHOWN RESPECT, RATHER THAN DERIDED AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

12. WHAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IS WHETHER THE GOE CAN ACCOMMODATE TO THIS LATEST POLITICAL UPSURGE WITHOUT SMASHING ALL THE CROCKERY. RODRIGUEZ COULD SEEK TO DEFUSE HIS ADVERSARIES THROUGH SOME SUITABLE GESTURE (E.O. HE COULD REPLACE HIS NATIONAL PRESS DIRECTOR GILBERTO MANTIALLA WHO HAS DEVELOPED A REPUTATION IN SOME CIRCLES AS A LEFTIST AND DICTATORIAL RASPUTIN WITH EXCESSIVE INFLUENCE OVER THE PRESIDENT); AND HE COULD DO SOMETHING MORE TO MAKE THEM FEEL THAT THEIR VIEWS ARE GIVEN CONSIDERATION IN POLICY FORMULATION EVEN IF NOT ALWAYS HEEDED. BUT THE DANGER
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LIES RATHER IN THE POSSIBILITY THAT POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF THIS KIND WILL ONLY HARDEN THE GOE'S POSITION AND CONFIRM IT IN ITS CONTEMPT FOR THE "TRADITIONALIST OLIGARCHS" LEADING TO MORE ARRESTS AND REPRESSION IN WHAT UNTIL NOW HAS BEEN A RELATIVELY CALM AND GENTLE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, POLITICAL SITUATION, POLITICAL SUMMARIES, POPULAR RESENTMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975QUITO02719
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750140-1148
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750428/aaaabail.tel
Line Count: 319
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 SEP 2003 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <10 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POLITICAL TEMPERATURE RISES IN QUITO
TAGS: PINT, EC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006